

“Worship Works Wonders”

Date: December 4, 2016 Place: Lakewood UMC
Texts: Revelation 4:6b-11; Luke 2:8-15 Theme: Advent, Worship
Occasion: Advent 2, Max Lucado series

Have you finished your Christmas shopping yet? Have you started? When you buy, do you plan to give people *practical* gifts that you know they'll be able to use? Or do you give people *personal* gifts that you know they'll enjoy, but wouldn't buy for themselves?

I remember one year my Dad bought my Mom a new set of kitchen pots and pans for Christmas. She was less than thrilled. She was hoping for something more personal. But Dad knew the pots she had been using were worn out, so he went for the practical.

Christmas and gift giving: the two have always been associated with each other for good reason. The magi gave Jesus the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. The shepherds gave Jesus the gift of their time and belief. Mary gave Jesus the gift of her womb.

Those gifts are all rather practical. The wise men's treasures could be used to fund the family's escape to Egypt. The shepherd's visitation would keep the family company. Mary's womb would protect the growing child.

But there is one gift that might appear a bit curious - the angels' gift of worship. “Suddenly the angel was joined by a vast host of others - the armies of heaven - praising God: ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven,’ they sang, ‘and peace on earth for all those pleasing him.’”

The angels filled the night with light and the air with music, and well, that's it. They worshipped. Couldn't they have done something

more useful? Mary could have used a bed. Joseph might have liked an angelic escort back to Nazareth. Baby Jesus needed a basinet. For goodness sake, these were angels. Didn't they know better?

Then again, these were angels. Who knew Jesus better than they? Those who knew Jesus best loved him dearest. Those who had followed him the longest gave him the gift of worship. They placed their love on a pillow of praise and presented it to Jesus.

They did that night. They still do. Heaven at this very moment reverberates with loud corporate worship. Recall this verse from Revelation 4:8 – “Day and night they never stop saying, ‘Holy, holy, holy.’”

Worship happens anytime you turn your heart toward heaven and say, “You are worthy.” When you clear your calendar for prayer, turn the radio dial to praise music, or use your morning jog to recite Bible verses, or your lunch break to have devotions, this is worship.

Worship happens in neighborhoods, in living rooms, in open pastures. And yes, worship happens in churches. When the people of God make a public and plural declaration of God's goodness, worship is happening.

Oh, we can worship the wrong things. The list of idols is almost endless. People have worshipped money, success, alcohol, sex or food. In proper perspective, these can be wonderful gifts from God. But they are dismal substitutes for God. To worship them is to be satisfied, then brokenhearted; infatuated, then discouraged; enthralled, then angry.

But when we worship God, when we praise Jesus Christ, when we exalt the Holy Spirit; well, worship does to the soul what a spring rain does to a thirsty field. It soaks down, seeps in, and stirs life.

Are you stressed? Worship God, who keeps the universe running in good order. Are you ashamed? Worship Jesus, whose love never fades. Are you bereaved? Open your heart to your Shepherd. He will lead you through the valley of sorrow. Worship works wonders.

For your own sake, do what the angels did: make a big deal about the arrival of the King. Celebrate his birth. Delight in his life. Honor his death and resurrection. Worship God who loves the world so much that He sent his only begotten Son into the world to save it. Worship Him. Celebrate Him. Praise Him.

Worship Him verbally. Hebrews 13:15 says, "Let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that openly profess his name." Don't be afraid to say the words, "Praise the Lord." God delights in our praise. He wants to hear our affection

Do you love God? Let him know. Tell him – out loud, in public, unashamed. Learn the language of praise and worship, and use it. "Thank" you, Lord." "Praise you, Lord." "Hallelujah!" Be like the angels on the night that Jesus was born – verbally praise Him – make a big deal about the arrival of the King.

Worship in community. The Bible says, "There was a *multitude* of the heavenly host praising God. (Luke 2:13)" The presence of Christ in our lives deserves an abundant chorus. In every generation there have been those who have said "yes" to Jesus but "no" to the church.

For a variety of reasons they turn away from church attendance. They do so at a great loss. Something happens in corporate worship that doesn't happen in private worship. When I see your face, and we see each other's faces on Sunday morning, and we hear each other joining together in song and prayer, we are all mutually edified. We bless each other.

Granted, congregational worship is imperfect. We often sing off-key. God doesn't care. Our attention may tend to wander. The preacher may stumble over his words. It may not be perfect.

Even so, let's worship. The sincerity of our worship matters more than the quality. Let's be like the angels on Christmas night, and gather to worship, and praise the Presence of God in Christ.

The worship of the angels that first Christmas night, well, it may not have been the most practical gift. But I imagine it pleased Jesus greatly.

This year, give Jesus the gift the angels gave him: the gift of praise. Don the robe of grace, soar on wings of faith, and take your place in the heavenly chorus and sing, "Glory to God in the highest." And all God's people said, "Amen!"

This sermon borrows heavily from the book *Because of Heaven – Love is Born, Hope is Here*, by Max Lucado. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2016, pp. 61-69.